



**National Park Service**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**

Glen Canyon National  
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## **GLEN CANYON – NEWS RELEASE**

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For Immediate Release

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### **GLEN CANYON NATIONAL RECREATION AREA ANNOUNCES PUBLIC VIEWING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLESIOSAUR EXCAVATION PROJECT**

**PAGE, AZ** Superintendent Kitty Roberts is pleased to announce opportunities for the public to view the plesiosaur excavation project that will be conducted in the park this July. “We are very fortunate to have both Dr. David D. Gillette and Dr. Barry Albright as the lead paleontologists on this project and are excited to offer the public an opportunity to see the down-and-dirty side of paleontology in action,” said Roberts.

Both Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument have worked together to support Drs. Gillette and Albright in continuing scientific research and discovery. This effort continues to provide new information regarding biodiversity 30 million years ago in this region of the Colorado Plateau. Visitors are encouraged to visit the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument Visitor Center at Big Water, Utah to see exhibits and learn more about this project.

Dr. Gillette is a paleontologist with 29 years of experience in research, teaching, and administration. He is conducting this excavation and possibly another one during 2003, with follow-up laboratory work to remove rock from the bones and repair breaks and damage to the fossils. Dave and his crew have excavated several important plesiosaur skeletons from this area during the past four years. Some are on display at the newly opened exhibit in Flagstaff at MNA, “Plesiosaur—Terror of the Cretaceous Sea.” Dave and his co-leader Dr. Barry Albright will be on site to answer questions and speculate about the implications of this discovery.

The project entails excavation of the skeleton of a large plesiosaur from the Tropic Shale, a rock formation laid down in the sea floor as fine mud about 90 million years ago and will take at least a week and may take several more. The skeleton was discovered a year ago. It was partially excavated before covering the quarry to protect the site. The site has nicely preserved bones of the shoulder and vertebral column of this marine reptile, and we expect to discover more bones as the excavation progresses.

The purpose of the excavation is to recover the skeleton for research, education, and display. It promises to be one of the largest plesiosaur individuals found in this area to date, with a total body length of more than 30 feet. It had a huge head, with jaws perhaps 5 feet long and containing about 100 piercing teeth. The legs were modified as sleek, powerful paddles. This was the terror of the Cretaceous Sea of southern Utah and northern Arizona.

The overall goal of the project is to understand changes in Late Cretaceous biodiversity over 30 million years, a span of time that few scientists elsewhere in the world have the opportunity to examine. Patterns of extinction, migration, and evolution during that period of time can be correlated with profound changes in habitat—from the shallow Cretaceous sea to rivers and dry land conditions. The dominant animals that lived here then include a variety of marine reptiles such as plesiosaurs, turtles, and mosasaurs that lived in the sea, and an astonishing variety of dinosaurs and their relatives that lived on land.

The public viewing opportunities as follows:

**When:** July 2 8:00 AM - 11:00 AM (Mountain Standard/AZ Time)

July 3<sup>rd</sup> 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM (Mountain Standard/AZ Time)  
and  
4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (Mountain Standard/AZ Time)

**Where:** From Page or Wahweap, drive north on Highway 89 to Big Water, Utah. Between mileposts 7 and 8, turn right (sign on the highway indicates Big Water City). Turn right 0.3 miles from the junction (sign reads “Glen Canyon National Recreation Area – State Highway 12 which indicates the road). Drive approximately 11 miles on this dirt road.

The road is passable by all vehicles unless there is a sudden storm with heavy rains. Do not attempt to cross any drainage in flood stage. The site is perhaps 300 yards from the road and must be reached on foot. The hike includes climbing a modest hill to reach the quarry. Visitors should park along the shoulder of the roadway. National Park Service staff will be on-site. Please – no off-road travel or parking is allowed. Children are welcome. Bring cameras and lot of questions.

**Be prepared: Temperatures max exceed 100°. Wear sturdy shoes and bring a hat, drinking water, and sun protection. Also, be prepared to carry out any refuse you carry to the site. Your respect for the land and the people working there is appreciated.**

The National Park Service reminds visitors that personal collecting of fossils is prohibited on public lands. If you see fossils, please do not pick them up or otherwise disturb them—their context is critical to science and education.

**\*\* EDITOR’S NOTE \*\***

For media opportunities please contact:

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